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THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE xv., 11-32.

I shall speak, this evening, upon the narrative, or principal contents of the narrative, contained in the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel. It is the parable of the Prodigal Son. I shall pass through the two preliminary parables, and expend the time upon this one.

The passage opens with the gathering of one of those remarkable throngs that assembled to hear the Saviour wherever he went, and that increased in the later months of his life until they became so unwieldy as to be positively dangerous.

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

It is not a mere matter of fine criticism that emphasizes such words as, "Then drew near unto him": they are words which carry in connection with many other elements the impression which is produced upon the minds of all who study the personal habits of our Saviour. There is abundant evidence that he never stood afar off, as if in merely official relations; that he never made such a separation of himself from his people as is implied by audience and speaker according to ordinary modern usages. He went with the throng. We have little hints which show that when he wrought his miracles they were wrought in the way of affection and personal attention. If a blind man was to be healed, he took him by the hand, and led him out of the town, and then healed him. He would go near to persons, and put his hands upon them, and pronounce the sanative benediction.

So there gathered about him, wherever he went, those who were attracted by the singular power which he had, and of which sympathy was largely the secret. There gathered about him a large class of people; and not only did they stand and look afar off, held back by a certain awe, but they came where he was. They came even unbidden into the dining halls. They came into his very presence. They wept upon his feet. They touched him. They indulged in various familiarities toward him. And when it is said, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him," we are to imagine that he stood in a throng of these worst men—as they were esteemed by the genuine Jews.

The publicans were hated because they were foreign officers. Usually they were Jews; but what business had a Jew to be collecting taxes from his own people to put into the treasury of imperious, haughty Rome? He turned against his own kind, and became the instrument of a foreign despot. Aside from any extortion that they might practice, the ignominy of serving an enemy toward whom the Jews cherished the utmost bitterness and hatred rendered the publicans, the tax-gatherers, the most despicable of men to the patriotic feeling of the Jewish nation. The sinners were men and women of an abandoned character; men and women that had lost moral restraint, and had gone to the very extreme in vice—the outcasts, the undone, the wrecks of society. Here was a goodly audience gathered about him of these publicans and these sinners; and you may well suppose that the orthodox Jews felt the utmost horror of it.

"The Pharisees and Scribes murmured."

That is, they whispered, muttered. You know that sometimes good men are left to do that when things do not go to satisfy them. There is a great deal of talking behind the back, and a great deal of criticism and whispering going on, about persons who are not, according to their views, sound and right and safe. So was it with these men who had spent their whole lives in being good, and were so proud about being good that they had not got past the body, and had not had time to attend to the inward man, the soul—these

men, who were so exceedingly scrupulous, who knew the truth, who had found it out—who knew to a line just what the church was, and just what the church should be ; and who had complied with the requirements, who had fulfilled the law, they thought, in every jot and tittle. If anybody did not know what the flavor of piety was they could tell them. If anybody wanted to know anything about God and the eternal government they were the ones to inform them. They were the favorites of God. They had the law, they had kept the law, and they knew what it consisted in. When they went after our Saviour, and looked upon his methods of teaching, and listened to his discourses, they went as critics ; and seeing about him this great unwashed throng, this great crowd of men vomited out of the waste places of Jerusalem, or of the Galilean cities, that surrounded him, they said :

“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

Now, they could have got along with him very well, probably, if he had kept a good distance off, in pontifical robes, or with an air more impressive than any pontifical robes, and had laid down the law to those wicked men out there ; but he made himself as one of them, and they came close up to him, and he made them his fellows. He received them not simply into his presence, but into his company. They sat at the table with him ; and in that oriental country to eat bread with one was to recognize him as a friend. He not only talked to them, but he ate with them ; and that was thought to be as bad as to commune with them at the same table, he belonging to one sect and they to another.

Then it was that our Saviour uttered this exquisite parable of the Prodigal Son ; and we will follow the course of the Prodigal Son, for the sake of bringing out, afterwards, several points that may well occupy our attention.

The point that he makes, and what may be considered as the text, is:

“I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

In another place the same thing is said in another way:

“Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,

more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."

This is the text—divine sympathy with broken down, sinful men, and divine joy in their recuperation—the sympathy of God and the helpfulness of God to all that have sinned and are making even the feeblest strife to regain themselves. God is on the side of every sinner that desires to cease sinning.

"A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country."

It is a striking fact that the first step that was taken amiss and downward (the first impulse probably anteceded this, but the first actual downward step) was the one of no longer desiring to abide under the parental roof. The bonds of affection were slackening. The wish to be his own master was growing in him. A vague and wild curiosity to know what was in the world was stimulating him. He could not bear the routine of morality in his father's house. He could not endure the restraint of his father's eye and voice. Therefore he determined to take his possessions and go and see the world. There have been thousands since his day who have wrecked and ruined themselves because they wanted to see what was going on among men. So he took his property and went forth from his father's house, and came to a far-off country where he could not be sent for nor interfered with. He had wild liberty. He had absolute confidence in himself. He felt perfectly certain that he knew enough to take care of himself. "Let those remain tied to their mothers' apron strings who want to," said he; "I am a grown man, and I know a thing or two." No doubt if any counsel had been offered him, he would have thrown it off indignantly. He was going to a far country where nobody could oversee him. He sought liberty; but it was the liberty of the lower nature. It was not the liberty of the moral sense, striving to disengage itself from the thrall of superstition. It was not the liberty of a noble nature, seeking other channels for sympathy and beneficence. It was not the

liberty of a generous soul who, seeing the truth, is resolved to break through old accustomed ways, and give up the world, though it should cost him his name or his life. It was not the liberty of the upper man. It was the liberty of the lower man. It was that kind of liberty which is called *license*; and he soon became licentious—for it is said,

“He took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.”

He poured out freely his means upon the cup. He indulged in the wildest and merriest dances. He was full of gayety because he was full of youthful spirits. He denied himself nothing that his eye saw, that his ear heard, or that his heart coveted; and his passions became his counsellors.

“When he had spent all [and it did not take him a great while to do it], there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.”

Of course now there was nothing for him to do but to ask assistance from those neighborly fellows who had met him so often, and enjoyed his hospitality. The moment he made his necessities known to them of course they would succor him. Not so. When he sought their aid they were nowhere to be found. Those who had shown him so much friendship, admired him, walked with him, coquettled with him, gone into every excess with him—they, surely, by their loving sympathy, would bear up a fellow sinner. No, they had other friends now. They could not attend to him. All his companions were gone. There was none who cared for him.

There is many and many a young man who is walking on the same track in the world. To-day he has friends enough. Just as long as his pocket holds out his company will be sought, but when his pocket gives out he will be abandoned. No selfishness is so hideous as the selfishness which prevails among the passionate who, having enjoyed all the wild delirium of pleasure with each other, heartlessly abandon one another in the hour of extremity.

“When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And [since he could do nothing else] he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.”

He went into the saloon to begin with, and he went into the pig-pen to end with. It was not a long reach from the glory, the dazzle, the pride, the vanity, the lust and the license of his youth, to the humiliation and the shame, the degradation and the want of a swine-herd. There is no recall of him, no yearning after him. But there are a great many men that spend their substance and their youth and their health in riotous living who have a heart left. There are many bad men who have much in them that is good—who have a sense of honor lingering in them; who have aspirations, and who have yearnings for things high and noble. There is many a man who has philosophy with which to reason on his own mistakes, and who longs to reascend the path by which he descended so swiftly.

So was it with this young man, who had spent all, and began to be in want; and who went and joined himself to a citizen who sent him into his fields to feed swine. He went, and for aught that we can see he did his work faithfully. He began to be sensible at last; for when a man has gone down by false steps of self-abuse it is something if he accepts his situation, and sets up, in the low depth to which he has sunk, some foundations for renewed life.

Well, you will observe how this young man is spoken of, as if he had been insane. It is said, “When he came to himself.” He had not really been himself. Every man has an equator, and all below that line is animal, while all above that line is himself. The upper manhood, the higher nature, is not the animal in you. It is that which allies you to the angelic, to God, to the invisible and eternal world. There is many and many a man who lives in his lower nature, and who is, as it were, insane, but whose sins, whose remorse, and the misery which comes from these, begin to bring him to his higher and better nature. He has proved the lower nature, and found its falsity, its oppression, and its danger; and through the suffering which comes from the wild indulgence of his lower nature—that which he is to leave with the dust when he dies—the door is open to that which is higher. “He came to himself.” As a man that has been insane is, by some cooling draught or potion, brought to sanity and

reason again, and is softened, and made rational, so this young man was brought to himself.

Blessed are they who, after following temptation and solicitation, and reaping misery, learn by that misery what is the royalty of their better nature, and are ashamed of sin and of sinning. Such was his extremity of suffering that he “would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat ; and no man gave unto him.” He was alone. He was uncared for and unprovided for. Those sweet and edible pods which were fed to the swine he would have chewed for his own sustenance.

Well, he had time for one thing—he had time, amidst his grunting charge, amidst the chanking swine, to think ; he had time to suffer ; he had time to be sorry. There are a great many men who have not time to be virtuous ; who have not time to be religious ; who have not time to do a great many things ; but there is no man who does not find time, by and by, to be very sorry, very sad, in his adversity. So did this young man, “when he came to himself ;” and I do not know that there is anything in this world more touching than that vision of home which rises, in their extremity, upon the wicked, either to torment them, or to lure them by the hope and promise of sympathy and succor.

I have stood by the side of those that were sick, and I could bear to witness their pain ; I could harden myself, as a surgeon would, to perform all the offices that were needful for their restoration ; but when, in the midst of their trouble, when perhaps unconscious of what they were saying, they would call out, “Father ! father !” or “Mother ! mother !” it was more than I could bear. The going back of those who have gone through a career of license and wickedness to the visions of childhood, its sweet innocence, the security of home, and the joy and pleasure of household fellowship—I think there is nothing that touches a sensitive person more than this.

And so the Prodigal Son, when he was reduced, through indulgence, to extreme distress, and when no man would show him any charity or any succor, began to bethink himself of his own father’s house ; and he said :

"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise, and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

Now, that is honest; that is manly. He did not say, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will state the circumstances." Oh, no. If there is anything in this world that is the devil of the casuist, it is "circumstances"; but he was not so bad as that. Having sinned, he had courage to look upon his sin and call it sin, and know that it was sin, and take it in all its magnitude. He attempted no acquittal, no palliation, no excuse, no piteous fear, addressed to the compassion of his old father.

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Here begins to spring out the exquisite delicacy and sensibility of a heart that is returning to a wholesome repentance, to nobility and to truth. He is already partly reformed whose soul begins to move to higher instincts.

"I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

Beautiful, that is, in its simplicity and humility. He knew how to go down, and, blessed be God, he knew how to go up, too; but there are a great many men who know how to go down but do not know how to go up.

Well, how fared it with him?

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him."

Men see a great way with telescopes; eagles and vultures see a vast distance: but I take it that there is no eye that is so unerring and that sees so far and so sure as a parent's eye looking for a lost child.

"When he was yet a great way off his father saw him."

And he saw all that was good in him; for fatherhood in its purest form is the truest expression, as it is the sign and symbol of the Godhead.

"When he was a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

He waited for no word. He put him upon no conditions,

There was no preparation. His father did to this son that returned just that which God does, and to all eternity will do, to every erring or struggling spirit that, uprising, goes to him—he gave him something of himself; he gave him acceptance; he gave him sympathy and kindness. It is the nature of God, it is the nature of every true father, to do it.

The beauteous child, flattered and deceived, in an evil moment flees and wanders, and goes from bad to worse; and the mother's heart is sore through years, hearing from her and yet not being able to recover her; but at twilight, on some evening, as the mother sits and sees things darkling, there comes a form, ill-clad, with feeble step and sunken cheek, through the open gate. The mother knows her, and with open arms rushes to embrace the child that has come back. No word is spoken. Both hearts are pouring out a sacred tide. She bears her child to the house. "Mother, I have come home to die." "My child, live." Ought not the mother to say, "The public sentiment of this neighborhood requires that I should call out from you some token that you have repented"? Ought she not to put her on some condition? Would it not be a violation of public sentiment to take her back without words? Nay; is there anything that cleanses away the sin of a child so fast as the loving heart of a parent? Men seem to think that there must be some preparation through which a man shall come to God. Yes, the everlasting nature of God himself. That is the preparation. It is the heart and soul of divine love that quickens to remorse the hearts of men that go wrong; that brings light to their darkness; that sees them afar off; that draws them by the cords of love; and that takes them then with a heart overflowing with forgiveness, not because they have done this, that or the other thing, but because God is infinite in sympathy and in love; because God's nature, the moment your soul is open to it, pours a stream of cleansing redemption into it. God forgives from what he is, and not from what you have been.

The young man had come, you know, with a good orthodox confession; and he was going to pour it into his father's ear; but he found himself embraced, and wept over, and

kissed. He struggled through, and said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He could not get out the other part—"make me as one of thy hired servants." He was smothered in his father's embrace, and he could not get it out.

What was the father's reply? He did not hear what the son said; it all, as it were, went to the wind; and he called to his servants, in fatherly gladness:

"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand [that scrawny hand which had just come from the husks and the swine], and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry."

And the reason was:

"For this my son was dead and is alive again."

That was reason enough for you and me, and for every noble man and woman, because God has lent us a little of his own feeling. There is no other argument.

Our Father in heaven is purer and better than earthly fathers; and if an earthly father knows how to bear and forbear, and wait to be gracious, and, with a generosity of love, to forgive those who have gone wrong, how much more shall God forgive, and cherish, and build up to eternal life, every one that comes to him, or that desires to come to him.

Well, this is a beautiful picture; but still, we must finish the whole scene. There was one other son. We have now, next, one of these perfect folks who censured Christ for eating with sinners; one of these pharisaic precisionists; one of these men who thanked God that they never stumbled; one of these men that knew what was right, and always did it. The story is in this language:

"This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The old house shook. The lights glanced through the windows. The music was wafted into the field, where this exceedingly good elder brother was.

"Now, his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew nigh to the house [he could not imagine what they were about there] he heard music and dancing [it seems to have been a long time since there had been anything of that sort in the old house]; and he called

one of the servants, and he asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come: and thy father hath killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and he would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which had devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Well, now, I would rather be the repenting Prodigal Son than the elder brother. Was not he a mean sneak? and was it not designed that these two brothers should stand over against each other and teach the world? The contrast between a man who by strong and impetuous inclination is led to sin, as the publicans sinned, as the sinners sinned, as the harlots and courtesans of Galilee or Jerusalem sinned—between a man who is carried away by his overpowering passions, but who, when he sees the final results of his wicked course rebounds, and goes back, and frankly, honestly, acknowledges his sin—between such a man and one like this elder brother? Is not that character painted so that it seems a great deal more admirable than that of this precise fellow who never sinned at all, to his own thinking? He never got drunk—no, he was too stingy to get drunk. He never could afford wine. He spent nothing on courtesans. He was too cold, too unsympathizing. He did not give a loose rein to passion. It was the very pride of his life that he never did wrong. He was one of these locked-up, tied-up Pharisees, who are so afraid of going wrong that they do not go anyhow—who are so afraid of doing wrong that they do not do anything. He was self-contained, self-worshiping, and exceedingly proper. He was going toward heaven stiff, stingy, lean, mean, selfish. He was going to heaven like a mummy. And when his brother went away, he probably damned him in his heart right orthodoxly; when he heard how he was going on afar off in foreign lands, no doubt he had a very great horror of sin, in other folks; and when he heard that he had come back again, doubtless he said, "The beast of burden back on my father's hands! Now he will be dividing his substance with him, and I shall have less. Besides all

that, look at the difference between us. I never ran away and he did. I never fell into any impetuosity, and he did. I never squandered anything upon harlots, and he did. In all my life I have never done anything that was improper. I am made like a clock, having a stroke at every hour, being regularly wound up, and keeping time; but that fellow has been through all sorts of circumgyratory courses of evil. My father has made for him a royal feast, but he never made a feast for me. He never gave me even a kid, but he has given him a calf"—and he was so mad!

Where was that brother's heart? Where was his love of the cradle? Where were his childhood memories? Where were those ties of kinship and blood relationship that should have stirred every man to gladness who had a spark of manliness in him, on hearing that the prodigal had come home? where was that impulse that should have led him to rush into the house and greet his returned brother, and say, "Let me help you"? He would not go in. He stood off, and grumbled. The salvation of his brother from destruction; his restoration to honor and love; the repairing of the breach in the household—all these things fell on him without producing any more impression than they would produce upon a stone. And yet, he offered his sacrifices and rattled through his prayers every day, and kept, he thought, a pretty correct account in his bank up above. O Pharisee! Cold, unsympathizing moralist! How can one help despising such a man? You despise him when I am describing him. There is not a man, woman or child who does not feel, as I do, that this kind of dry morality is hateful. You feel that a man without any heart, without any pulse, without any warmth in his blood, hardly belongs to the human family.

And yet, many of you will walk in New York, and when you see some poor, drunken, filthy, ragged fellow, who has fallen step by step all the way down, and is trying to reform, I am afraid you will pass him by without a thought of sympathy—without one yearning. Yea, I do not know but you will thank God that you are not as other men are. Perhaps you will say, "I might have fallen into such wickedness, but I was strong, and so was saved from it."

When we see these flaunting mistresses of the street, there is much that shocks our delicacy ; yet I never look upon them that inside of me there are not tears which move as from a fountain. When I see them, I see the mother ; I see the childhood ; I see the girlhood ; I see the sad days of neglect and abandonment ; I see the dying ; I see the cheap funeral, with no mourners ; and not only do I see the things that are visible, but I see the inner and spiritual reality. Do you see these things ? Does your heart go out toward strict people, and orthodox people, and church people, and your set of people in your denomination ? and do you look upon those who are outside of your denomination, upon those who are not church people, upon worldly people, upon people who have made mistakes in life, who have stumbled, and gone to the ground, degraded and ruined, from a high point—do you look upon these with coldness, and even with bitter contempt ? Then you are the elder brother.

If there be any meaning in this parable, it is that if a man stands where he probably thinks he is proper and right and virtuous, and has no compassion for his fellowmen who are in distress or want, even though it is by reason of their own folly, then he is the elder brother. Such a man is more despicable than he who has sinned more grossly, and yet seeks to repent.

That is the meaning of our Saviour when he said, on another occasion, to these proud Jewish religionists :

“ Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

It is as if he had said to them, “ Their chances are better than yours.” Hardness of heart, the want of charity for others, lack of sympathy and genuine beneficence—this is a crying sin ; and against no class in Judæa did our Saviour hurl such anathemas as against cultured people, whose consciences were educated, but who were hard-hearted toward their fellow-men, and whose piety was without sympathy.

Dissipation through the basilar passions is not less bad than you think ; it is worse than you think ; but the dissipation of the upper nature, by which all that is divine in a man

is turned to coldness and selfishness, is a worse dissipation than the other.

In closing, I will add a few points. In the first place, let me say that according to this narrative it is never too late to mend. Perhaps there are some persons that have strayed in here who have been thinking to themselves, "What did he pick out that subject for? I wonder if he knew that I was coming. He has described my case exactly. I have been running away from my parents, from my instructors, from my own self. I have slipped and slipped; I have lost my name and position; I am hovering between life and death; and it is strange that he should have selected such a subject as that." No, it is not any more strange than that God should think of you, and by his providence should draw you where you hear such themes discussed. And I have a personal message for you. I have to say to you, to-night, you are a great deal worse than you think you are; you are a great deal worse than you yourself can measure or understand; and yet there is mercy in the heart of God for you. It is not too late for you to mend. It is not too late for you to turn round and go back to your Father, and say, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight!"

I have to say, secondly, to all such persons, and to all who are struggling to amend their mistakes, and to rise to a true life, that the heart of God is in its full tide of sympathy, and that those who need his help will receive it. "The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench, till he shall bring forth judgment unto victory."

Do you remember that remarkable scene which took place when our Master, a month or two before the crucifixion, was for the last time going from Galilee to Jerusalem? As he came to a Samaritan village, the people refused to give him shelter, or food, or drink. The disciples had been sent forward to prepare for his stay there over night; and John, whose name is now synonymous with the most perfect gentleness and love, but who had a fiery temper, said, with James, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" And the Master rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are

of ; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Jesus Christ came to teach this grand revelation of the universe : that in spite of all the dark appearances of things, regnant in the center of all power, in the midst of all that wisdom, whence issues that which controls all laws, there is a Heart that is full of compassion. The law of the universe is to restore, to recuperate ; and the heart of God is on the side of every man who needs divine love, divine pity, and divine mercy. You have not the power in yourself to do everything. You can do something ; but, after all, the great work, the transforming work, the blessed work that is done in us, is the pouring out into our souls of the nature and inspiration of the love of God manifested to us through Jesus Christ.

Not only is God's heart on the side of the poor and needy ; it is on the side of those who have stumbled by reason of strong drink, by reason of dishonesty, or by reason of headstrong passions and lusts. If you have gone through every one of the grades of defilement, and you find yourself at last among the swine, the heart of God is still on your side. It is on the side of the off-scouring and the most wretched of creation. Are you without a friend and without a benefactor ? God is your friend, and God is your benefactor. "Yes," you say, "he would be if I would repent ; but I do not feel like repenting." God is your benefactor repenting or not repenting. Repentance does not change him : it changes you. When the son was yet a great way off, and before one word had entered into the father's ear, the father ran to meet him ; and if you have in your soul one single movement toward hope ; if there begins to be in your soul a letting go of things that are past ; if there begins to be in your soul one aspiration, one yearning ; if you say, "If I could only try ; I have tried once, and failed, and it is of no use for me to try again ; but yet I cannot give it up, and I would be glad to try again," those thoughts in you are the fruit of the Spirit. They are the result of the moving of the Spirit upon your understanding and conscience and heart.

Now, I beseech of you, grieve not the Spirit of God ; for

what is he? He describes himself as one whose tenderness and gentleness are such that the bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench, till he brings forth judgment unto victory. That is, he is so gentle in his dealings with men whose integrity, whose standing, is liable to be cast down as is the tallest reed that is the least able to stand against the wind—he is so gentle in his dealings with them that he will not overthrow them. So gentle is he in his dealings with men that in no way will he make it hard for them to stand or to recover themselves.

You know, when the flame is first lit on a candle how faint it is, and how reluctant it is to burn; so that the least breath of air, caused by the movement of your body, blows it out; and if there is in your soul the beginning of a desire for a better life, no larger, no brighter, than just the tip of the flame kindled on the wick of a candle, so gently does God deal with this merest speck of light of another and better life that he will not quench it till he brings you through all the stages of reformation.

You have gone wrong, all of you. There is not one here who cannot lay his hand on his heart, and say, "I am a great sinner, and it is the grace and forbearance of God that give me life and mercy." There is not a single one of you that cannot say, "Lord, I have sinned, and I am not worthy to be called thy son;" and yet you have the assurance that God's heart forgives, that God's love strengthens, and that God's wisdom will guide you till you are brought through various states of development to that condition in which you may be transferred to the heavenly land, and begin again, with ampler power and a better guidance, to reap nobler fruits and an eternal blessedness.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE rejoice to come into thy presence, our heavenly Father, and to look up to thee as the Fountain of all wisdom, and all goodness, and all power. In thee we live, and move, and have our being. We rejoice that thus day by day we may feel ourselves joined to thee, so that thy power is upon us; thy wisdom comes before us; and thy goodness attends us all our lives. We look back at the way in which we have been led, and with growing admiration of thy goodness we desire to take courage from all thy past mercy, and to trust thee for the time that is to come. Thou surely wilt not change. Thou art in thy goodness the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. We desire, O thou that art without variableness or shadow of turning, to put our trust in thee; for though we have some strength, what is it for the emergencies which we meet; though there is for us the light of reason, how is it over-taxed with the problems of life! How are we continually thrown about hither and thither by those strong forces of the universe which we do not make, and which we cannot resist! We need thee; and our spirit needs the consciousness of thy presence and of thy government; and we pray that thou wilt help us this evening to say in our innermost heart, Thy will be done. May we rejoice in thee as the Supreme Governor, and as our Father-king; for we are reigning with thee, or are to reign, and are heirs with Jesus Christ to the eternal possession—for all things are ours if we are Jesus Christ's, and we walk with him in undivided inheritance, unrevealed as yet in its richest treasure, but to be revealed.

We pray that thou wilt draw near to all thy servants; that thou wilt hear their supplications, and that thou wilt move in them to pray for the things which they most need.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt hear those upon whom thou hast laid thine hand heavily, and who are mourners before thee; and that thou wilt grant them thy presence, thy strength, and the comforts of thy Spirit. For thou, O God, hast been the Comforter of mourners through the ages past; and thou hast not forgotten thy skill; and thy love is not weary. Thou canst nourish those who are sick at heart; and we commend them to thy special care.

We pray that thou wilt sanctify the disposition of every one that is in darkness or in suffering. We commend to thee those who are asking light upon their path from day to day. We commend to thee those whose way is great, and whose strength is small. Be thou their strength. May they trust in thee, and may they be able to walk firmly, neither falling nor stumbling.

We commend to thee all those who are engaged in the service of thy kingdom, making known the name of Jesus, and bearing the tidings of salvation, and of faith in Christ to those who are needy. We pray that thou wilt give them in their sympathy the very spirit of their Master. We pray that thou wilt help them to interpret the case of those whom they meet by their own experience. And we pray that thou wilt abundantly bless their labor.

We pray that thou wilt grant more and more abundantly that illumination of spirit which guides thy servants into all truth. Draw thy people nearer together by good works; by common labor in the common field; by the possession of a common Saviour; by the same hope and the same destiny.

We pray that all those differences which have sprung up, and all those separations which have come from pride of outward organization and from the selfishness of sects may be done away. Grant, we pray thee, that thy people may be delivered from the thrall and peril of these great evils. May all efforts made to further the unity of the spirit in the midst of thy people throughout the world be greatly blessed of God; and may that love which has but one tongue and which is of all languages unite the earth together, so that all men when the love of God is made known shall hear it in the tongue in which they were born. Bless those who seek the ends of catholicity in Christ Jesus. We pray that thou wilt send the gospel into the dark places of our land, to make them more and more fruitful in all knowledge, in all justice, in all peaceableness among our citizens.

Be pleased to bless the President of these United States, and all who are in authority with him. Bless the judges throughout our land, and all magistrates, and the great people. We beseech of thee that thou wilt more and more cause the light of truth to shine upon them, that they may be great, not in outward things alone, but in temperance, in justice, in love, and in purity.

And bless, not us alone, but all the nations of the earth. We pray that thou wilt let the light of Christianity stream abroad into every dark place, and carry thither the ray of hope. Overthrow all those machinations by which the strong seek to dominate the weak. We pray that thou wilt lift up the poor and needy. Strengthen all peoples till they are too mighty to be thralled. And grant, we pray thee, that with outward liberty and outward thrift may come the yet more abundant liberty of the soul.

We beseech of thee that with the riches of the Spirit may come the name of Jesus which in times gone by has been so glorious, and that it may be yet more resplendent in the times that are to come—that name over all, before which all creatures shall bow, and every tongue confess to the glory of God.

We commend ourselves in the service of the evening to thy care and inspiration. Grant that as we sing together the songs endeared to our memory here, we may be prepared to love those nobler songs in the higher sphere when we shall be brought home to our Father's house, to go no more out forever.

And to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, shall be everlasting praise. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

OUR Father, we pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon the word spoken. Grant, we pray thee, that thy truth may come home to us; and that it may be the word of God, not the word of man. May it enter and rest, not in the outward ear, but in the heart. Art thou not drawing some to thee to-night? Art thou not making the way of return more hopeful to some? Art thou not stirring the consciences of some that are not utterly cast away? Wilt thou not bring many from error? Wilt thou not glorify thyself and the royalty of thy grace in the conversion of men; in the restoration of backsliders; in the building up of thy people in the humility and sweetness and sympathy of Christian life and love? May we come together in all the power of the heart; and may thy will be done upon earth as it is in heaven.

And to thy name shall be the praise forever and ever. *Amen.*

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